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**THE COUNTERDRUG EFFORT:
AN ESTIMATE FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER**

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the public rhetoric surrounding a long-standing social problem -- drug abuse -- has intensified in scope and vigor. The counterdrug effort has earned the tag "Drug War," and as befits a war, the Department of Defense has been assigned a lead role.

This paper seeks to strip away the veneer of warlike terminology surrounding the fight against drugs. It will attempt to focus the military's role and recommend in general a concept of operations for a unified commander planning to meet an antidrug mission. It does so by broadly applying the Commander's Estimate process. The paper identifies that greatest risks in the counterdrug effort as political -- in both the domestic and the international arena. After re-examining the DOD's limited mission in interdicting illegal drugs, a sensible strategy to match these limited objectives will be offered -- one which will both contribute meaningfully to the fight and also leave the commander's forces better trained and more capable.

BACKGROUND

"When you have a war, who do you call in? You call in the military!"¹ Congressman Jack Davis

"We (the military) can't do much to affect the drug war, but we damn well can end₂ up carrying the monkey and wasting resources."²
Unidentified Army general

The Department of Defense's role in the counterdrug effort began in earnest with the 1989 DOD Authorization Act, in which Congress first legislated a military mission in this "war." This fiscal year, DOD funding for its antidrug tasking is \$1.2 billion,

up from \$450 million last year. Joint Task Forces 4, 5, and 6 have been established at CINCLANT, CINCPAC, and CINCFOR; and CINCSOUTH last summer proposed a bold, controversial plan to attack the Latin American narcotrafficking network.

Combined efforts to attack drugs at their source have been joined with South American governments, most notably Colombia and Bolivia. This year, over one hundred military advisers will be helping the Andean nations train troops to fight producers and smugglers.

To counter drugs in transit, the three task forces have been bolstered by (last summer before Desert Shield) forty-eight percent of all AWACS worldwide flying hours; by increased aerial tracking and surveillance from NORAD; by development of two-thirds of the planned seventy-five nodes in ADNET, DOD's antidrug, secure communications network which allows access by other federal drug fighters to the net's intelligence; by participating in Operation Alliance, a consortium of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.³

Domestically, the Pentagon has worked with state governors to expand the National Guard's participation in attacking the drug supply; the Guard has recently destroyed domestic marijuana fields, seized cocaine, and has provided equipment and personnel to augment local police. Furthermore, the DOD has strengthened its successful policy of drug demand reduction within its ranks, has trained prison officials in military-oriented rehabilitation programs, and provides assistance to a number of law enforcement agencies in their antidrug operations.⁴

MISSION

"President Bush gave the Defense Department a clear set of marching orders when he issued the National Drug Control Strategy. These plans carry out those orders."⁵ Secretary of Defense Cheney

In September of 1989, giving his first comprehensive counterdrug guidance to DOD, Mr. Cheney echoed the President's overall gameplan -- a strategy that is almost wholly supply-based. He declared that DOD "will help lead the attack on the supply of illegal drugs from abroad, under the President's strategy."⁶ Attacks on drugs at the source and in transit to users would be the objective. In carrying out this mission to stop the flow, DOD had been given three taskings by Congress: first, DOD is the lead federal agency in the detection and monitoring of illegal drugs' air and seaborne transit to the US; second, DOD is responsible for developing ADNET into a secure, effective command, control, communications, and intelligence (C³I) network to be shared by the military and other antidrug law enforcement agencies; and third, Congress has directed DOD to coordinate greater use of the National Guard in the effort.⁷

The mission and taskings are precise. Unfortunately, widespread misunderstanding of the drug problem, its nature and possible solutions has been caused by sensational news reports and political rhetoric. The use of combat imagery -- the Drug War -- when speaking of counterdrug effort does not enhance understanding. As the New York Times has editorialized: "...there's a vast difference between war and crime. Real wars are fought and thought about in terms of victory and defeat. To measure drug policy in these terms invites extreme thinking."⁸

Some political posturing has been extreme. Consider a Congressman's statement during a 1989 hearing: "This is war. And they (the military) are going to have to lace up their combat boots and get involved."⁹ So, if the problem is defined in warlike terms and if civilian agencies have so far failed to stem the flow of drugs, then does it not follow for some that the US should turn the responsibility over to the military? Does not such a shift show decisiveness? These are the seeds planted by many of the headlines and some of the debate over DOD's antidrug taskings; its narrowly-defined, limited mission is often over-stated.

An exception to this "fuzzing" of the issue in public debate were the thorough hearings on the military's counterdrug role conducted in mid-1988 by Senator Nunn's Armed Services Committee. Senior military officers, along with civilian experts, both in government and out, discussed many of the difficulties the armed forces face in assuming a more prominent antidrug profile. Admiral Frank Kelso, then CINCLANTFLT, testified emphatically that supply interdiction won't work and that the solution is to stanch demand through deterrence (like widespread drug testing).¹⁰ If the admiral is right, then are DOD's strategy and its approach to its mission off the mark?

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS (MOEs)

"...the use of the military in drug interdiction will increasingly be viewed as a positive role worth investment -- if it can be demonstrated that the military is effective in these operations."¹¹

Not only has the DOD's mission in the counterdrug effort often been obscured, but the MOE in its operations has never been defined.

In Figure (1), a transcript, Vice Admiral James Irwin, Commander JTF-4, offers a scholarly discussion of MOE to a congressional subcommittee, but he acknowledges that measures for the counterdrug effort still have not been developed.¹² Irwin's questioner concedes that fixing MOEs in DOD's drug fight could take years and will be linked with a reduction in demand. He cautions the admiral not to use "body count" as an MOE. "Body count" is a metaphor for claiming success based on trends in arbitrarily-chosen (but not necessarily revealing) data sets. Should success or failure be assessed, for example, by the trends in such statistics as quantities of drugs seized, numbers of arrests, or the increased street price of drugs? Admiral Irwin concurs, questioning this approach: "Simplistic measures of effectiveness will contribute little to combatting the drug abuse problem."

Why is "body count" not a valid MOE? Why doesn't more cocaine seized this year than last indicate success? Simply because the amount **not** seized cannot be known with any certainty. Similarly, isn't a rise in the street price of cocaine a good measure? Admiral Irwin believes this is the only MOE that makes sense. But is this proof of stemming supply? Or could it not indicate an increase in demand for a steady supply?¹³

Then, how about cost per seizure? Congressional estimates show \$400,000 of AWACS flight time per seizure in 1988. Similarly, what about hours spent in pursuit? Admiral Kelso, when CINCLANTFLT, expressed frustration in using steaming hours as an MOE: "I'm providing 1,000 ship-days, and I get four busts. If I provide 2,000 ship-days, do I get eight busts? I've only got 200 ships

Question: We understand that there is a substantial effort underway to develop Measures of Effectiveness for DOD drug interdiction. I want to caution you not to get caught in the "Body Count" trap. My own view is that this is a decades-long effort. Only our children will know how successful we were. Let's concentrate on doing the job as best we can and let history be the judge. Do you care to comment?

Vice Admiral Irwin: I have mixed emotions about this. Over the years attempting to come up with reliable measurements of effectiveness has been an elusive task. I am not convinced one can come up with a single satisfactory method. However, some measurements of effectiveness are necessary in the day-to-day conduct of our mission.

MOE are valuable for the following reasons:

- The use of MOE allow us to evaluate the current Courses of Action.
- Changes in Measures of Effectiveness prompt changes in current Courses of Action.
- Changes in Measured Effectiveness cue additional threat assessment.
- Measuring Effectiveness enhances our ability to efficiently allocate funds.

The above are short-term values for Measures of Effectiveness in military operations. Additionally, utilizing MOE will assist us in providing answers to queries by government officials, the DOD chain of command and other interested agencies. The long-term measure of effectiveness will be a drug free America for our children.

Question: We understand that there is a substantial effort underway to develop measures of effectiveness for DOD drug interdiction. I want to caution you not to get caught in the "body count" trap. My view is that this is a decades-long effort. Only our children will know how successful we were. Let's concentrate on doing the job as best we can and let history be the judge. Do you care to comment?

Answer: I agree with the Congressman. Simplistic measures of effectiveness will contribute little to combating the drug abuse problem. Our efforts are better spent contributing as best as we can.

Figure (1)

in the entire Atlantic fleet."¹⁴ Further, an "operating-hours" standard does not take into account any possible deterrent effect on drug traffickers these activities might have.

Finally, how about using the relative cost incurred by drug lords in doing business as a measure? But increased costs could easily be absorbed by them because the profit margins are so huge, the supply so cheap and numerous, the couriers so inexpensive and plentiful, and the transportation so ordinary. Moreover, according to Senator Nunn, even if the interdiction efforts were to shut off completely the flow of cocaine from present suppliers, "we would have chemical production (to replace it) in laboratories in people's homes and basements in this country within three months."¹⁵

Some advocate more subjective, less quantifiable MOEs: for example, judging the quality of the military's support for law enforcement agencies while performing its detection and monitoring mission; likewise, if ADNET proves to be a helpful tool in crimping the drug flow, this effectiveness could be another accurate benchmark, relating as it does to a specific tasking given DOD by Congress.

Finally, the less quantifiable the MOE, the more subject to political debate it becomes. Once again, for the operational commander, the counterdrug challenge confuses established military thought: How can he gauge success of his efforts when the criteria for success don't point to a "traditional" physical objective?

RISK ASSESSMENT: DOMESTIC POLITICS

"War, defined by Clausewitz at least, is a total commitment of a nation. I currently do not find that. What I find is ... 'let's

make the Army the scapegoat. We don't know
the answer so let's assign it to the Army and
let them try to solve it."¹⁶ Lt. Gen. Stephen Olmstead

Clausewitz, explaining the political essence of war, described a trinity related to military action -- a triangle whose sides comprised the government, the people, and the military. Ignoring the influence of any one of these forces "would conflict with reality to such an extent" that a true description of organized conflict would be useless. Any analysis of military operations must acknowledge a balance among the three groups, "like an object suspended between three magnets."¹⁷

In the past several years, the urgency assigned the counterdrug effort by the Congress and the President -- and by public opinion polls -- has intensified the political nature of DOD involvement. Clausewitz implies that the degree of intensity and unity of purpose exerted by each of the players in his trinity could forecast success, or could pre-empt it. A brief summary follows, describing the political positions taken by those "forces" influencing the military's involvement in antidrug operations. It should be noted that unity of purpose has assuredly not been achieved, nor has a common degree of intensity among the players been expressed. Political maneuvering surrounding the drug problem has not yet resulted in a consensus; there is no lockstep among the players regarding the role and the aims in using the military in the fight.

Public opinion. Recent opinion surveys measuring the public's attitude toward illegal drug use have been consistent in their findings. A 1988 survey found the citizenry concerned about the drug problem in the US above all others.¹⁸ Last year, seven-eighths

of those sampled found drug abuse among teens very serious.¹⁹ And just over a year ago, 62% of Americans would "give up a few freedoms" if necessary to combat drug use; the same poll found that four-fifths favored use of the military in the fight.²⁰

These polls seem to capture a sense of urgency that would favor tough action in the counterdrug effort. Whether these feelings have stamina is another issue. One Congressman questions the public's continued commitment "if body bags come back to this country"²¹ from future military action in Latin America. And last summer there was fierce local backlash in a California county when the Army helped law officers eradicate marijuana fields there. The crop, though illegal, was a source of income for more than several local citizens; some onlookers also felt threatened by an "invasion" of troops.²²

The military. Congressional hearings in 1988-1989 showed unanimity among senior military officers in their reluctance to get involved. Faced with a shrinking defense budget (but as yet an undiminished Soviet threat), uniformed leaders feared funding the counterdrug effort "out of hide." Other arguments used:

- o Involvement in drug interdiction distracts from the military's main mission of defending the country in a major war.

- o Drug interdiction is law enforcement, a function traditionally proscribed for the armed forces.

- o The funding and resolve needed by the military from Congress and the people will not be forthcoming. Result: the uniformed services are blamed for another Vietnam-style failure.

- o The enemy are civilians. Once again, it's a police problem.

o The drug problem is not a supply problem but a demand-based one. The rest of society should cleanse itself, as the military has done. Where there is demand, though, there will always be supply.

This intense aversion to any counterdrug mission could have predicted failure for the effort if Clausewitz's trinity is used as a litmus. However, many observers now detect an about-face by military leaders facing budget cuts as Communism crumbles. Do some senior officers see part of the "peace dividend" coming back to them as a counterdrug windfall? As Admiral William Crowe put it: "Certainly I think we'll put more emphasis on the drug war. And if there are resources tied to it, why, you'll see the services compete for those, and probably vigorously."²³

The government. In Congress, much of the antidrug rhetoric has been colorful as lawmakers have addressed what they believe is the urgency for action. At times, they have detected a hesitancy by military leaders to get involved. For example, a House member scolded the DOD in 1989 for not devoting "as much energy and intellect to getting on with your job as you did to 'just saying no'"²⁴ to its counterdrug mission. One consultant suspects that Congress's insistence on supply interdiction in tasking the military is an approach designed to appease a perceived clamoring among voters for action.²⁵ Employing high-technology weapons against evil drug peddlers has more appeal than dreary programs aimed at curbing demand. Politicians may also fear some voter disapproval if casual users are singled out as villains. But whatever its motives, Congress has shown a willingness to vote increased funds for the military's

role, more than doubling its counterdrug funding this fiscal year.

Within the Executive Branch, there is a now an eagerness to employ the armed forces in the fight. Defense Secretaries Weinberger and Carlucci both stridently opposed DOD involvement and were allied with military leaders in their opposition. However, Mr. Cheney has shown a readiness, first as a Congressman and now as the defense chief, to pursue a more active DOD role, as the President's National Drug Control Strategy prescribes.²⁶

In sum, it appears that the unity of purpose long lacking from this particular Clausewitzian triangle is now emerging. This new cohesion among the players won't ensure success without adequate resources directed toward the fight, but it may preclude a failure from lack of commitment. The greatest future risk for DOD in executing its mission may also be political: Will the military be blamed even if it is sent off to do battle against an incorrectly identified center of gravity? Will the objectives be emphatically supply-oriented and focus on the military's fight against traffickers, rather than on a more crucial battle -- the one against demand? Perhaps an operational commander with counterdrug tasking would be comforted by former Coast Guard Commandant Paul Yost's belief that no society has ever had a high level of addiction without an abundant supply. "You cut down on the availability of drugs in a culture," he says, "and you're going to cut down on the use and the addiction and the demand."²⁷

NARCOTRAFFICKERS' CAPABILITIES

"The chief threat to our national security in the

1990's may well come from hordes of red tomato
cans rather than hordes of Red Communists."²⁸

Rep. Nicholas Mavroules

A numbing volume of statistics describes the vast amount of illegal drugs channeled into the US each year. To accomplish this level of trade, traffickers enjoy a variety of options to penetrate border defenses. As one method is countered by the military or law enforcement agencies, the suppliers have readily turned to another. For example, by the end of the 1980's, air transportation of cocaine and marijuana from Latin America to the US had been virtually shut down by JTF-4.²⁹ In response to this successful opposition, the drugs are now sent across land routes through Mexico, often to the western coast. From there, supplies often enter the US across the Baja border or by sea in a container aboard a cargo vessel. JTF-5, the West Coast drug task force of CINCPAC, has only half the funding of its LANTCOM counterpart, has no dedicated AWACS (JTF-4 has four), and fewer than half the ship-days committed to it than JFT-4 enjoys. In addition, JTF-5 must contend with the rising amount of heroin coming into the West Coast from southern Asia.³⁰

Containerized vessels are one of the most invincible modes by which to ship drugs. Only about one percent of the containers each year is inspected. Moreover, an agent who suspects a drug shipment on an incoming vessel must laboriously inspect each of the stacked containers, where a ton of cocaine might be surrounded by several tons of coffee.³¹ In addition, the millions of cars and trucks which come from Mexico each year contain an unknown quantity of smuggled drugs, often disguised as canned goods ("red

tomatoes"). As with ship traffic, how constipated would the border commerce become even if the money could be found to increase inspections?

Another emerging technique used by traffickers is to send their largesse across the border with illegal aliens. One million Latin Americans crossed the southern border uncaught last year, and an unknown but significant percentage were used as couriers. And even with newly-formed JTF-6 patrolling the Rio Grande, "because of Mexican political sensitivities, US drug enforcement patrols have not been as aggressive in patrolling the area around Mexico."³²

Thus, drug suppliers have shown resourcefulness and flexibility in changing their tactics when effectively opposed by US interdiction efforts. Further, the Chicago Tribune reports, the present \$1 billion military counterdrug effort is far short of the "\$20 billion that the Joint Chiefs said it would take to secure America's borders."³³

OPTIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

"To stop drug abuse requires reduction of supply and/or demand, neither of which are easy tasks under today's conditions."³⁴ Former Defense Secretary Carlucci

If stopping the traffic is a daunting task, then how about taking the fight to the drugs' source? What about a counterdrug version of "shooting the archer, not the arrow?"

General Maxwell Thurman, while last year still the head of Southern Command, developed an aggressive antidrug concept: Attack the infrastructure tying together regional narcotraffickers.³⁵ This continental drug raid would have comprised a number of simultaneous blows to the common command and logistic network (such

as supply hubs) used by Latin American drug lords. Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia would have supplied the troops used in the attack, but the planning and the operational support would have been provided by the US military. In addition, SOUTHCOM reportedly had also developed a concept to use US special forces to kidnap key drug lords and bring them to the US for trial.

Behind Thurman's move toward activism in the counterdrug effort lay his beliefs that the present US law enforcement technology and procedures (like those employed by the Drug Enforcement Administration) are plodding and outdated -- ineffective in the South American antidrug arena. Southern Command has advocated a multinational attack on regional narcotraffickers everywhere and at once, coordinated by using a sophisticated communications and information network (a prototype of which has been installed in Bolivia).

The future of the general's imaginative and aggressive plan following his departure from SOUTHCOM is uncertain. One thing is known, though -- the political echoes from such a "hemispheric" plan would be loud and have significant effects. Congress would undoubtedly want oversight in the effort plus assurances about US troops' role in the fight. How protracted would American involvement be after the "lightning" raid? Do those advocating such an operation realize that Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia together cover an area one-third the size of the US? And finally, what of the effect on inter-American relations?

Historically dismayed at Washington's insensitivity to their sovereignty, Latin American leaders and their constituents could

become offended easily by a US plan to attack supplies in their countries -- even if American troops are not involved. Moreover, cocaine production means over \$1 billion a year to Bolivia's economy, as one example; this amounts to one-quarter of that nation's gross product.³⁶ The loss of such large revenues could devastate regional stability.

Recognizing this, President Bush in 1990 signed the Cartagena Declaration with the leader of Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia; the communique pledged greater US financial aid in return for a greater Andean effort at crop eradication and substitution. Obviously, though, US fiscal problems may preclude meaningful funding. Even if the dollars were sent, there are other obstacles to eliminating supplies: debilitating squabbles among Latin American police and soldiers on how to attack drug producers; total failure so far of State Department-sponsored regional eradication programs; corruption among the Andean military forces and regional police; and the failure by Latin American courts to inflict meaningful punishment on the traffickers, including the weak efforts to send drug lords to the US for trial. A further risk in Peru is one of escalation: drug lords purchase armed "protection" from the Shining Path revolutionaries.³⁷

Thus, neither interdiction of drugs in transit nor stopping them at their source will likely achieve success. And given that the problem may be one whose solution lies in a long-term attack on demand, does the operational commander have an option with a greater likelihood of success?

The answer lies in re-examining DOD's mission as set out by

Congress and expanded upon by Secretary Cheney. Ignoring the political sensationalism surrounding the issue, one remembers that the military's role is a limited one, focused on detection, monitoring, information sharing, and support of law enforcement agencies. Within these discrete boundaries, the CINC can contribute to the counterdrug effort. While he won't be able to eliminate the scourge, he can be a significant team player in the fight. His payoff is that along the way he'll be able to enhance his forces' readiness and develop their capabilities that may be needed in future armed conflicts. Rather than viewing drug interdiction as a siphon of scarce operating resources or as a distraction from his "real" mission of defending the nation in war, the operational commander has the opportunity to garner tangible gains from his involvement.

First, counterdrug operations in the Caribbean and Latin America have the characteristics found in other low-intensity conflict (LIC) scenarios -- the type the US military may confront more often as the defense focus shifts away from a European ground war. These "new" enemies may have little high-technology firepower and show no interest in confronting military force head-on. Indeed, regional narcotraffickers have employed methods more common to organized insurgents or terrorists to overcome their opposition so far. Such a LIC environment, together with its determined, well-resourced enemy, provides a fertile ground to cultivate the capabilities of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. Yet, so far, the counterdrug battlefield has the added advantage of having a low risk for operating personnel and equipment.

What other warfare skills can be honed in this arena? Using the Navy as an example, here follows a brief list of possibilities.³⁸ Presumably, such an accounting could be done for other branches, too, as they move onto the scene after Desert Storm:

- o Developing radar contact analysis to a high art in the target-rich Caribbean. How can civilian and commercial contacts both in the air and on the surface be identified and tagged as likely drug carriers?

- o Improving information sharing among ships and planes employed in the fight. What technology and procedures can be developed to enhance data links between military (or military and civilian) units tracking smugglers?

- o Gaining further proficiency in nighttime operations against an enemy that does much of its trafficking in darkness.

- o Sharpening visit and search skills.

- o Operations in localized areas, like Caribbean chokepoints, complete with drug-running opponents, which will enhance sea control capabilities. Always remember the large portion of American commerce and military equipment that must move through the waters in this region.

- o "Spin-offs" from drug interdiction which may have further applications elsewhere, like the sea-based aerostat, a relatively low-cost balloon radar platform that, when tethered to a ship, can detect contacts in a sixty-mile radius.

- o The opportunity to develop operational deception (OpDec) techniques and methodically gauge their effectiveness as they are employed against this on-going threat.

- o Use this test-bed to gain proficiency in handling intelligence in a LIC environment. The armed forces must learn how to share information with civilian law enforcement agencies (rather than among themselves only). Also, the military must gain an appreciation for the nuances in gathering, analyzing, and acting upon data in this "civil" arena. For example, the enemy is not distinctively marked, and a vessel or a plane ceases to be a threat once it delivers its cargo. Not so with a Soviet ship or aircraft.

- o Finally, the operational commander can expect a public relations windfall from his enthusiastic participation in counterdrug operations. Given the current popular concern about drug use and its threat to American society, the military's involvement in the near future will likely bring approval from the voters -- and the purse holders in Congress and the Pentagon.

But rather than taking a blind leap into the fray, the operational commander should take a wary step toward battle, mindful not only of the limited DOD mission, but also of the following:

- o Recognize the difficulty in fighting the drug supply in an open society where the demand -- which cannot be influenced by the armed forces -- remains strong.

- o Recognize the subjectiveness in measuring success and avoid a "body count" MOE which may mask real results.

- o Recognize that more groundwork must be laid by political leaders before there is a consensus for bold action in Latin America (like SOUTHCOM's concept) -- or against suppliers at home.

- o Recognize the mercurial character of a social problem. Today's crisis, which may call for a "Drug War" to combat it, may

be downgraded in emphasis sooner rather than later. For example, very recent surveys indicate that casual drug use and use by those outside low-income groups are declining quickly. Will drug abuse be a problem of the underclass, largely ignored by the "haves" of society?

CONCLUSION

"I think it's legitimate for military men
to try and perpetuate their institution and
to look for ways for it to be more appropriate."³⁹

Admiral William Crowe

The Department of Defense's mission in the counterdrug effort is a limited one, but one which can expect greater emphasis at the conclusion of Operation Desert Storm. Rather than rejecting the mission as a no-win tasking with unacceptable political risks (or one which is a law enforcement responsibility, not a military one), the operational commander should instead plan his involvement enthusiastically -- albeit carefully. The antidrug operating environment provides a rich arena for developing new capabilities and burnishing old ones. And, as the Central Front becomes a more and more remote battlefield, the Latin American theater may be the next area of conflict. This region can, at least, provide practice for operations in a low-intensity confrontation.

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